

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

SKETCHES NO. X.

"Look round our world! Behold the chain of Love,
Combining all below, and all above!" POPE.

It has been justly observed by a celebrated author, that, as even the most minute atoms of matter declare aloud, the omnipotence of the God of nature, so, every object proclaims, also, his bounty and beneficence. It is he, who, during the vernal season, "causes the clouds to drop fatness," the air to soften into balm, and the aromatic flowers to enamel the plains. Amidst the burning heats of summer, it is he who expands the leaves, and thickens the shades; it is he who spreads the cooling harbour for our reception, awakes the gentle breezes to refresh us, and causes the rivulet to sooth us with its gentle murmurings.—In Autumn his bounty covers the fields with the golden treasure, and bends the boughs with loads of delicious fruit. He furnishes his hospitable table with plenty, and prepares a copious magazine for future wants. Nor, are these smiling seasons the only periods of the year, in which the benevolent governor is conspicuous. Even Winter declares his presence, and is eloquent with his praise. Storms and tempests fulfill his word, and extol his power. The piercing frost bears witness to his goodness, while they bid the shivering nations tremble at his wrath! How mighty! How majestic! and how mysterious are thy works! thou sovereign ruler and Lord of nature!—all the rolling worlds above, all the living atoms below, together with all the beings that intervene betwixt these wide extremes, are vouchers for an ever present Deity. His goodness warms in the rising sun—and refreshes in the evening breeze. His glory shines in the lamps of midnight, and smiles in the rays of the morning. We see a trace of his in-

comprehensible grandeur, in the beautiful extent of things, and a sketch of his exquisite skill in those almost evanescent sparks of life—the insect tribes. But, for what end has the lavish hand of providence diffused such innumerable objects of delight, which compose this scene of things, if *all might not rejoice in the privilege of existence*, and be filled with love and gratitude towards their beneficent author? To enjoy, therefore, the blessings he has sent, is virtue and obedience, and to reject them is ignorance, or absurd perverseness. Infinite goodness is the source of created existence; the proper tendency of every rational being, from the highest order of rapt seraphim, to the meanest and most degraded rank of men, is to rise incessantly from low degrees of happiness, to higher. They have all faculties assigned them for various orders of delight. This is the language of religion;—the true enjoyments of reasonable beings do not consist, however, in unbounded indulgence or luxurious ease, in the tumult of passion, the langour of indolence or the flutter of trifling pursuits, yielding to immoral or trifling pleasures, debases and corrupts the mind, and disqualifies it from enjoying its real good.—Whoever would be really happy must not merely enjoy the pleasures of this world but make diligent and regular exercise of his higher powers, his chief attention, adoring the perfections of his maker, expressing and exercising good will for his fellow creatures, and cultivating inward rectitude. To his lower faculties, he must allow such gratifications as will, by refreshing him, invigorate his nobler pursuits.—In regions inhabited by angelic natures, unmingled felicity may forever bloom; joy flows there with a perpetual and abundant stream, nor need there any mound to check its course. Beings conscious, however, of a diseased frame of mind, as the whole human race has cause to be, must use the regimen of a stricter self-government, whoever has

been guilty of voluntary excesses must patiently submit to the painful workings of nature, and the needful severities of medicine, in order for his cure. Still he is entitled to a moderate share of whatever alleviating accommodations this fair mansion of his merciful parent affords, consistent with his recovery, and in proportion as this recovery advances, the liveliest joy will spring from his secret sense of an amended and a proving heart. So far from the horrors of despair is the condition of all even the most guilty!—while the most faulty have every encouragement to amend, the more innocent will be supported with still sweeter consolations under all its experience of human infirmities; supported by the gladdening assurances that every real endeavour to outgrow them will be assisted and made effectual by divine grace. To such a one, the lowliest self abasement is but a deep laid foundation for the most elevated hopes; since they, who faithfully examine, and acknowledge what they are, will be enabled, under the conduct of religion to become what they desire. The Christian and the hero are inseparable; and to the aspirings of an assuming trust and filial confidence are set no bounds. To him, who is animated with a view of obtaining approbation from the sovereign of the universe, no difficulty is insurmountable, secure in this pursuit of every needful aid, his conflict with the severest pains and trials is little more than the vigorous exercises of a mind in health. His patient dependence on that providence which looks through all eternity, his silent resignation, his ready accommodation of his thoughts and behaviour to its inscrutable ways, and unbounded mercy, is at once the most excellent species of self denial, and a source of the most exalted transports. Society is the true sphere of human virtue. In social active life, difficulties will be perpetually met with; restraints of many kinds will be necessary; and studying to act correctly in

respect to these, is a discipline of the human heart, useful to others, and improving to itself.—Suffering is no duty—no virtue, but where it is necessary to avoid guilt, or to do good; nor pleasure a crime, but where it strengthens the influence of bad inclinations, or lessens the generous activity of virtue. The happiness allotted to man, in his present state, is indeed faint and low, compared with his immortal prospects and noble capacities; but yet, whatever portion of it the distributing hand of heaven offer to each individual, is a needful support and refreshment for the present moment, and an earnest of that refined joy which awaits all without distinction in those realms to come.—

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"THE UNITARIAN MISCELLANY."

A new periodical publication has been commenced in Baltimore, under the above title, which is issued monthly, each number containing not less than thirty-six pages, duodecimo, making a volume annually, of nearly 500 pages, at one dollar and fifty cents, payable on the first of May.

In the first number we are presented with an "*Abstract of Unitarian Belief*," which we propose to give to our readers, in order to shew (so far as Unitarians are consistent with themselves,) that Unitarians differ in nothing from Universalists.

FROM THE UNITARIAN MISCELLANY.

Abstract of Unitarian Belief.

As unitarians consider the Bible the only proper summary of religion, they do not profess to comprise their sentiments in any system of articles, or forms of human invention. They consider the language of scripture sufficiently plain. They look with suspicion on the decisions of councils, synods, and church dignitaries, because all men are subject to error and prejudice; and the history of eighteen centuries has abundantly taught us, that few have been less free from these imperfections, than the rulers in the church. While we have the written word of God in our own hands, we think it an imperious duty to consult the divine oracles themselves, and to build our faith entirely on the simple truths they contain.

For this reason unitarians have no written creeds, which they impose on

their churches as necessary articles of belief. Their creed is the Bible; nor can they conceive by what authority any denominations of christians have assumed the right to enforce on the credulity of any among them more, than the Bible contains, or to require, as a condition of christian fellowship, a solemn assent to doctrines and opinions expressed in language very different from any used in scripture. To us this seems an impeachment against the wisdom and goodness of God. It implies, that he has given us a revelation, which is defective, and the leading doctrines of which we cannot understand, although they were expressly intended for our instruction, edification, rule of life, and means of happiness.

As we totally disapprove going to any other source, than the sacred word of God, for our religious opinions, so we shall never desire to lead our readers to any other. Many christians, and we believe very good people, have become so much attached to creeds, that they seem seriously to think them an essential part of religion itself. No objection is more often heard against unitarians, or more loudly uttered by this class of christians, than that they have *no creed*. And because, in their minds, creeds and religion are the same, the triumphant and logical conclusion is drawn, that unitarians have *no religion*. Yet, while we believe the revealed truths of God, humbly and devoutly implore his aid to lead us right, rely on his mercy, and strive to comply with the terms of salvation by faith in Christ, sincere repentance, and a holy life, we trust we have something of religion, notwithstanding our reason and our conscience will not allow us to receive the commandments of men as doctrines of God. We hope never to accuse any of our opponents, who are thus minded, of having no religion, whatever fondness they may show for the inventions of men, or however defective they may think that creed to be which is contained in the scripture alone.

The question is often asked, what unitarians believe? Curiosity is not satisfied with being told, that they believe all that is taught in the Scriptures. It has become so customary for christians to have the system of their belief written, arranged under separate heads,

subdivided into articles, and all collected into a book distinct from the bible, that few minds seem capable of comprehending so strange a novelty, as that of laying aside this appendage, and still having a consistent religious faith. To adapt ourselves to this state of things, we propose to bring forward, in as few words as possible, some of the leading views of unitarians, not as articles, which are necessary to be believed in addition to the bible, but as truths, which they think are there clearly revealed or taught. It is not our purpose to go into minute distinctions. We aim only at a general view, by which such of our readers, as are little acquainted with the subject, may attain some tolerably correct notions of the grounds and principles of our belief.

Unitarians believe, that the scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain authentic records of the dispensations of God, and of his revelations to men. We think the evidence of the truth and divine authority of these books to be abundant and convincing. Several unitarian writers of great celebrity have written expressly in their vindication and defence.

We believe, that the revealed truths of the scriptures are in conformity with the principles of right reason, and consistent with one another. We hold it to be impossible, in the nature of things, that any truths, which God has revealed, should be irrational, or contradictory among themselves. What stronger evidence can you have of the falseness of any proposition, than that it contradicts an undeniable truth, violates the plainest laws of your understanding, and opposes the deliberate convictions of your judgment? No such proposition, we are persuaded, can be contained in the scriptures. If any are found apparently of this character, we believe the obscurity arises from an imperfect acquaintance with their meaning, and that further inquiry, and more accurate rules of interpretation, will prove them to be perfectly consistent with the clear, positive parts of scripture, and with our rational convictions. Passages, about which there can be no doubt, should serve as guides in explaining the obscure. To suppose a text was intended to be mysterious, or to teach a mysterious doctrine, because we do not understand it, appears

to us the height of presumption and absurdity. All language is mysterious till we find out its meaning. But this does not prove that it has no intelligible meaning. It proves only an ignorance, which we may overcome by industry, study, and a proper exercise of our faculties. This holds equally in regard to a knowledge of the scriptures, and all other knowledge. Without adopting some such rules as these, and proceeding on the principle, that the scriptures have every where a consistent, and intelligible meaning, it is no wonder the inquirer is perplexed with mysteries, obscurities, and contradictions.

To be continued.

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Saturday, February 10, 1821.

"THE CHRISTIAN REPOSITORY."

The editor of this work, (after inserting our notice of it, from page 52 of the present volume of the C. Messenger, at the close of which a reference was made to Prov. vi. 12, 13, 14, 19.) observes, "The reader will perceive, by turning to the above named passages, by which the writer would admonish 'Hiram,' and 'Philo,' that they are implicitly charged as the *naughty, the wicked, and as walking with a froward mouth;*" &c. and concludes by saying, "that if 'Hiram' and 'Philo' had, by their writings, made themselves culpable to such a degree, as to need the admonitions which are offered them, he (the editor) must share his portion of the reproof for giving them a place." In answer to the above, it is only necessary to state that the editor of the *Christian Repository* is entirely mistaken if he supposes that "Hiram" and "Philo" were "implicitly charged" with any thing more than what was candidly and openly stated; which was that "such insinuations," (as their writings contained, and which had been distinctly stated) "appear to us to be more disingenuous than a direct, and open attack:" an opinion was also expressed that the "influence" i. e. of "such insinuations" tended, among other things, "to see *'discord among brethren.'*" This, howev-

er, was by no means charged as being the design of the writers, for their writings may produce effects which they did not design. The passages in Proverbs were referred to, to shew the wise man's opinion of such things, and not *implicitly* to charge the writers with any thing more than what had been named. The editor of the C. Repository adds, "On a careful review, it is believed, 'Hiram's' piece will be found to be 'a direct and open attack,' of a system of sentiments, (not of any one particular author) which he briefly describes." We have therefore reviewed the piece for the purpose of making the discovery, but, being dull of apprehension, remain in the same opinion respecting it as formerly; neither do we believe that it has been so understood by others, as we cannot learn that there has been any reply to it from any source whatever. "'Philo,' he says, 'evidently gives his faith concerning 'a resurrection to condemnation,' and 'of a general judgment,' and a few scriptures which he considers support these ideas.'" True: but he does not tell us what he means by "a resurrection to condemnation," nor when he supposes "a general judgment" must take place. If the design of these writers was merely to excite a discussion on the subject, as the editor seems to think, they have certainly failed in the attempt, as no discussion has grown out of it, although there has been certainly time and opportunity. If these writers really believe in a future punishment, that is, a punishment after death for the sins committed in this life, let them state the doctrine clearly and explicitly, so that the discussion may not be merely about words, and then state the scriptures on which they shall rely for its support; and shew that those scriptures must necessarily be so construed—and, when they have done this, we will either acknowledge the doctrine true, or shew wherein they have failed in giving it support. But before they attempt any thing of this kind, we advise them to read carefully and attentively the correspondence which was published a few years since, on this very subject, in the "Gospel Visitant." It commences, vol. ii. No. 2. p. 115, and is continued, No. 3. p. 186, No. 4. p. 206, vol. iii. No. 1. p. 296, No. 2. p. 369. This correspondence,

it seems, was broken off in consequence of the discontinuance of the work above mentioned; and it has not been renewed, although there has evidently been an opportunity in the Universalist Magazine, a periodical work of more than 18 months standing in Boston. The subject is by no means exhausted, and the above correspondence is mentioned only to shew that arguments which have already been replied to need not be repeated; unless it can be shown that the answer already given is not satisfactory. If these writers, therefore, or any other, wish for further discussion on this subject, there is an opportunity, it being what *we* also most sincerely desire.

A TREATISE ON THE CARNAL MIND.

Continued from page 108.

Hatred, strictly speaking, can exist only in imperfect beings, who judge of things from their present appearance, without viewing the whole ground; or without seeing the object in all its relations and bearings; and none, in my opinion, but very imperfect and ignorant beings, could *even have formed an idea* that such a principle ever existed in God.

The Scriptures, however, in many places, seem to represent God as being "angry with the wicked," and without doubt it is true, in a certain sense; that is, the wickedness of the wicked, as such, is opposite to the Divine nature; but I conceive that much of the scripture language was adapted to the weak capacity of man. The true moral light was not then come; and things were written as they appeared to men at that time. Thus we read of God's *repenting* of his *grieving*, of his being *angry*, and what is still more remarkable, even *ignorance* is sometimes implied! As in Gen. xviii. 21. "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether, according to the cry of it (to wit, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah) which is come up unto me; and if not, I will *know*." See also Deut. viii. 2; xiii. 3. But few, I apprehend, if any, ever believed these things strictly true; but that they were written according to the weak understanding of man in the first

ages of the world. For we also read that "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." Num. xxiii. 19. "For I am the Lord, I *change not*; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Mal. iii. 6. But if God were once to be angry, strictly speaking, he must eternally remain so, or else he must both *change* and *repent*!

Apparent truths are frequently directly the reverse of real truths. The sun appears, to us, to rise in the east, and set in the west; whereas, so far as we can ascertain, it is fixed in nearly one position. The earth appears to stand still; whereas it revolves upon its own axis once in twenty-four hours, and round the sun once a year. The moon also appears to revolve from east to west, whereas its course, as it respects the earth, is from west to east; but its real course is a crooked path round the sun!* And so in many of the most important truths in the natural world, the apparent facts are diametrically opposite to the real facts.

Hence we ought not to judge altogether from appearances, but to judge righteously; that is, from real, known, and established principles; for if our premises be erroneous, although we may reason ever so correctly, all our inferences must be erroneous of course. And this rule will hold equally good in the moral world, as it is in the natural: it is as good in theology as it is in philosophy or astronomy.

It would be very difficult to reconcile many of the dispensations of the providence of God with his Divine character, that is, with infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, or, in other words, with DIVINE LOVE, were we to judge from the present appearance of things; "For," saith Solomon, "no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." Eccl. ix. 1. But did the wise man mean that God had made no manifestations of his love? Or did he mean as a greater than Solomon hath declared? "that he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Matth. v. 45. This,

* As the moon revolves round the earth, and with the earth round the sun, its path round the sun must be *crooked*, varying the diameter of its orbit.

I think, must have been his meaning; and hence we cannot determine who is the most happy, if we judge altogether from their outward appearance. Vice, for a time, may appear to flourish and prosper; and some have been led to suppose, that the vicious do, in fact, enjoy the most happiness, in this life: And that, in order to win Christ, or obtain heaven and happiness in another world, we must absolutely deny ourselves of many real enjoyments, which would be really worth possessing, were it not for fear that we should be disappointed of heaven, in another world, in consequence of those gratifications. But permit me to ask the serious, reflecting mind, what real enjoyments have the vicious, in consequence of their vices, that would be really worth possessing, or that any one would be likely to sigh for, any more than he does now, provided that he could be sure of heaven and happiness, in another world, notwithstanding he should allow himself in those carnal indulgences in this; practices which, to be sure, are too prevalent? Is it the enjoyment of those riches which are obtained by fraud, injustice, and deception?—then let it be remembered, that it is possible for a very painful heart to ride in a gilded coach, and appear in pomp and splendour! Is it the gratification of carnal desires?—then look around, for one moment, and behold those who have gratified those desires to their full extent; and see them, in addition to the loss of character, and consequently the loss of all the happiness that is worth living for, carry around with them the painful and loathsome testimonials of their folly! Think seriously for a few moments—behold the miseries constantly attendant on vice—appearing in as many forms as you can think of crimes—no sweet to be tasted on that ground, but what has its bitter—no pleasure, but what has its remorse—say, will you call such pleasure yours?—say, would you wish to enjoy them, even if it were certain that their stings would not continue beyond this life?—If you would—then, go—and learn wisdom by thine own folly—and in the end lament and say, "How have I hated instruction—how have I set at nought reproof!"

"The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are

peace." The further any one progresses in virtue's path, the more he will become reconciled to the providence of God; as the more we are enlightened into the knowledge of the truth, the more we discover that all those dispensations are designed for our good. And by possessing an undisturbed conscience, which nothing but virtuous endeavours and reconciliation to God can produce, we enjoy true felicity.

Two things, only, are necessary to constitute real happiness.

1. An honest heart, in which guilt cannot reside. And

2. A knowledge that all the dispensations of the providence of God, towards us, will ultimately terminate in his glory, and our own best good.

I shall now close this *Treatise* in the words of St. Paul, which I hope will make a due impression on the minds of all who may feel disposed to give this work a fair and candid reading.

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts, AND THEN SHALL EVERY MAN HAVE PRAISE OF GOD." To which may be added the following,

"And thus, on the grand and final consummation, when every will shall be subdued to the will of GOOD TO ALL, our JESUS will take in hand the resigned chordage of our hearts; he will tune them as so many instruments, to the songs of his own sentiments, and will touch them with the finger of his own divine feelings. Then shall the wisdom, the might, and the goodness of our God, become the wisdom, might, and goodness of all his intelligent creatures; the happiness of each shall multiply and overflow, in the wishes and participation of the happiness of all; the universe shall begin to sound with the song of congratulation; and all voices shall break forth in one eternal hallelujah of praise transcending praise, and glory transcending glory, to God and the Lamb! There shall be no lapse thence forward, no falling away forever; but God in his Christ, and Christ in his redeemed, shall be a will and a wisdom, and an action and a mightiness, and a glory rising on glory, and a blessing rising on blessedness through an ever beginning to a never ending ETERNITY."